

The figures as to the number of factories and workers employed therein do not purport to coincide with those of the Government Statistician (annual statistics of factory production), as his returns, which are drawn up purely for statistical purposes, do not cover various small establishments that are included as factories under the Factories Act.

It might be explained that the above figures are those ascertained at registration time (April in each year) except that in order to include factories in seasonal industries, which might be closed in April, any new establishments opened during the year are added. The figures shown for 1936–37, therefore, chiefly represent the numbers in April, 1936.

The upward movement in the number of factories registered and in the number of factory workers which commenced in April, 1934, was maintained during last year, there being large increases under both headings as compared with the previous year. The improvement has been fairly general, but the most marked increases have been in coach and motor-body building, clothing, and white working, motor and cycle engineering, sawmilling, and other trades associated with the building industry and the furniture trade. Boot and shoe manufacturing did not maintain the improvement shown in previous years. The latest figures in the above table relating to the number of factories and the number of factory workers reached a record level.

It may also be pointed out that the improvement in factory employment has, as would be expected, been reflected in the increased number of certificates of fitness issued to boys and girls under sixteen years of age to work in factories, the number issued last year reaching the record figure of 4,462, an increase of 1,472 over the previous year.

Registration fees received during 1936–37 reflected the increases above noted, being about 9 per cent. greater than in the preceding year. In respect of the 1937–38 year the revenue received during the first quarter indicates that a further increase, both in factories registered and in factory workers, may be anticipated this year, establishing a new record level under both headings.

ACCIDENTS.

In order that the accident statistics may be comparable with the statistics of other countries, as urged by the International Conference of Labour Statisticians in 1923, the figures cover the calendar year instead of the financial year.

The total number of reported accidents to workers in factories is 3,327 (3,132 males and 195 females). Of the total number, 135 of the accidents occurred to workers under sixteen years of age, 760 to those between sixteen and twenty, and the remaining 2,432 to those above that age. Of the eight fatal accidents two were caused by or were due to machinery. Of the total accidents, 551 were caused by or were due to machinery. The other principal causes of accidents were found to be as follows: Falls of persons (from stairs, ladders, platforms, &c.), 350; stepping on or striking against fixed objects, 144; faulty handling of tools, 821; handling of other objects—viz., objects dropped or tipped over objects falling, or strain due to handling—1,097; handling of poisonous, hot, and corrosive substances, 138; others (miscellaneous), 226; total, 3,327. Disability caused: Temporary disability, 3,214; permanent partial disability, 105. Fatalities, 8.

Information in respect of time lost in 3,146 cases shows that a total of 55,825 days were lost, or an average of 17·7 days for each worker.

The total amount of compensation paid in the 3,242 cases in respect of which the details have been secured was £38,698 14s. 3d.

The following particulars are given of the fatal accidents that occurred during the year:—

An employee of an engineering firm who was about to operate a portable electric grinder was electrocuted, apparently as a result of a short circuit caused through a faulty cable.

A machinist at an assembly bench in an ammunition factory was killed instantaneously when an explosion occurred in the vicinity of the machine operated by her. It was not clear how the explosion occurred.

A motor-body builder was fitting a metal panel inside a bus when a sheet of glass about 3 ft. above him broke and fell out of its panel, apparently as the result of vibration caused by the hammering below. A piece of the glass struck the worker on the neck, severing the jugular vein.

A tinsmith's labourer was working at a vat containing a hot solution of caustic soda when he fell into the vat, suffering burns, which later proved fatal.

A worker engaged in the manufacture of acetylene gas removed the cover of the generator for charging purposes, but, finding difficulty in making the iron guide-rod and pistons go down into place, attempted to hammer the guide-rod down with a 56 lb. cast-iron weight. An explosion occurred, the worker suffering injuries, which later proved fatal.

Following either a slip or a fainting turn a butter-factory worker fell against the back of a churn, his head being crushed between the roller-gear cover and the gear-box casing.

A number of women were working in a shed at a fireworks-factory wrapping and labelling fireworks when apparently one who was wearing shoes with steel heel-plates stepped on one of the fireworks in course of manufacture, causing it to explode. Further explosions occurred amongst the fireworks, and the shed took fire. All the employees managed to escape from the building except one, who suffered fatal burns before she could be rescued.

The headman on the breaking-down bench at a sawmill was crushed and fatally injured when a log, which was being hauled up the skid, caught on the edge of the skid and rolled over on to him.

In the following case the accident was to a person other than a "worker" within the meaning of that term as defined by the Workers' Compensation Act, 1922:—

Deceased, the owner of a small sawmill, was operating a breast saw when a piece of the wood, which had been put through the saw, came in contact with the teeth and was carried back over the top of the saw, striking deceased in the chest with fatal results. Deceased had removed from the rear of the saw the protecting fin placed there to minimize the possibility of such accidents.